

Seinfeld Battles Actor Danny Hoch ... BY DEIRDRE DOLAN

THURSDAY, MARCH 5

4 Did you happen to catch that *Seinfeld* episode this season in which a young performance artist, played by Kathy Griffin, does a monologue calling Jerry Seinfeld "the devil"? Well, it looks like Obie Award-winning actor Danny Hoch, 27, was the basis for that one. He'll be doing a solo show starting March 30 at Performance Space 122, directed by Jo ("Don't Call Me Mrs. Eric Bogosian") Bonney, and in it he does a long monologue calling Jerry Seinfeld "the enemy." Mr. Hoch performed the Seinfeld-as-enemy bit in Los Angeles in November of last year and believes that word got back to the target of his rant, leading to the Kathy Griffin spot....

Now why would Mr. Hoch hate America's Beloved Entertainer? He said it goes back to the time when he couldn't bring himself to play the part of a Latin pool boy in the stereotyped manner demanded by the *Seinfeld* star. It was a show from 1995 that involved Jerry and Newman swimming at a health club. Mr. Hoch was supposed to play an unsavory pool boy with a heavy Spanish accent; at the end of the episode, the pool boy has drowned, and neither Jerry nor Newman is willing to give him mouth-to-mouth resuscitation....

Mr. Hoch's experience gives a nice glimpse of how the show's cast, including Julia Louis-Dreyfus, Jason Alexander, Michael Richards and its ex-head writer, Larry David, work together in a minor backstage crisis....



PHOTOFEST



PAULA CORT

"I normally don't do sitcoms because they really have no substance and are about passivity rather than activity," said Mr. Hoch, beginning to explain why he originally took the gig, "but I had just gotten back from Cuba, and I was disoriented. I had never watched a whole episode, but my honest logic was that if this is the most watched thing on TV, and if I'm on it, more people will come see my theater. When I read the script, I saw what the part could possibly be, and so I called up and said, 'This isn't your stereotypical Spanish-speaking pool guy, is it?'—because otherwise, I wasn't getting on the plane. And they said, 'Not at all, it can be whoever you want to be.' But when I got there, I found out it was the stupid one-dimensional role that I didn't want to do...."

"During the table read-through, I did the part as a higher-strung version of me. And everyone laughed, and I think they were maybe embarrassed to ask me to do it in a Spanish accent with, like, 30 people sitting around. Once you finish the read-through, you get up and block it, and then it was just me and Jerry and Jason and Julia and Michael and the director, and I think they felt like they could ask me then. It's what they had in their mind, but it came as a surprise to me. When they asked me, I thought, 'Aaaaah, I should have followed my instincts.' ..."

"We got into a discussion, which got into an argument. Jerry and the director Andy [Ackerman] came up to me, and they were like, 'Why not?' And I was like, 'The role is stupid and it's a clown and I have no problem doing it and it's funny, but I can't do the Spanish accent because it's one-dimensional.' I said, 'Why does it have to be in Spanish? Why can't it be Israeli?' And Jerry said, 'Because it's *funnier* that way.' Which is when it became obvious to me that there was nowhere else to go with the discussion. So he called Larry David on his cell phone, and 10 minutes later he came down and said, 'Why did you fly all the way across the continent for this? It's just a half-hour comedy show, what's the big deal?' And I said, 'It's a big deal to me because there's too many friends of mine who are highly trained actors that are Cuban and Puerto Rican and Dominican, and all they get asked to do are one-dimensional roles and here I am, not even Latino, and you're asking me to play a clown and I can't.' ..."

"Everyone was laughing when I was doing

it as me, but it seemed to be a Jerry issue—he really believed it was funnier in a Spanish accent. And the sad thing is, maybe it would have been funnier to people in a Spanish accent. And what does that say about the American people? I don't do the work that I do to make fun of the people that I play, but to make fun of the audience. They tried to give me a guilt trip like 'You're just a kid from New York and we're *Seinfeld*,' and, basically, they were like, 'You're ruining our lunch.' ..."

"Jason and Julia were really cool about it. They were very supportive, and they both said, 'If that's what your instincts tell you to do, then you shouldn't do it.' But Michael Richards was like, 'Just do it or else they're going to replace you.' And I was like, 'Who gives a shit! My life doesn't revolve around this shit!' I think Jerry thought I was challenging his position, like who the hell am I to question him. It was almost as if he was doing me a favor because every actor in the world wants to be on *Seinfeld*. But not me. So the next thing I knew, I got back to the hotel and they said the rehearsal the next day was postponed while they found someone else, and then they told me I could fly home as soon as I liked. And I never got paid for the day's work.' ..."

Mr. Hoch's show at P.S. 122 has the very un-*Seinfeld*-esque title of *Jails, Hospitals & Hip-Hop*. A *Seinfeld* publicist said the Kathy Griffin episode may have been based partly on Mr. Hoch's experience on the show, but also included Ms. Griffin's own experience from her first time as a *Seinfeld* guest....

On tonight's episode, Jerry goes on a "revenge" date. [WNBC, 4, 9 P.M.]